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COMMITTEE ON THE EXERCISE OF THE INALIENABLE
RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 222nd MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 31 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. KA (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

1. The agenda was adopted.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN ON THE CAIRO SEMINAR ON ASSISTANCE TO THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, THE NORTH AMERICAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE AND THE MEETINGS OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY

2. The CHAIRMAN said that the Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, the report of which had been issued as document A/51/166-E/1996/67, had been held in Cairo, under the auspices of the Committee, from 21 to 23 May 1996. The discussions at the Seminar had shown a clear understanding of and commitment to the principal objective of the event, and had reflected a spirit of openness, sincerity and compromise. The information and analyses presented had been extremely useful both to the participating United Nations entities and to the Palestinian participants. In programming its future activities, the Committee would consider appropriate follow-up to the recommendations made at the Seminar.

3. The North American Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Symposium on the Question of Palestine, the report of which would be issued as a publication of the Division for Palestinian Rights, had been held in New York from 24 to 26 June 1996. The holding of such a symposium each year attested to North America's concern about the future of the peace process and to the capacity of NGOs to mobilize public opinion in solidarity with the just cause of the Palestinian people. The creation and expansion of an active network of NGOs that supported United Nations objectives was also an important aim of the Committee's programme of cooperation with such organizations. The Symposium had served to clarify General Assembly mandates on NGO meetings, as well as the Committee's objectives. The recommendations for NGO action should be implemented with commitment and energy, and the newly elected North American Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine should provide all the necessary impetus.

4. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) had held the sixty-fourth session of its Council of Ministers and its thirty-second Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from 1 to 10 July 1996. The reports of the OAU Secretary-General on the Middle East and Palestine had stressed the deterioration of the situation as a result of acts of violence in the region, as well as the concerns raised by the recent political statements of the new Israeli Government and the question of whether it would respect the principle of exchanging land for peace. However, they had also noted the commitment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to the peace process. The Council of Ministers and the Assembly of Heads of State and Government had reaffirmed OAU support for the peace process, and had adopted resolutions on the question of Palestine and on the situation in the Middle East.

5. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Palestine) said that he appreciated the efforts made at the Cairo Seminar and the OAU summit meeting, the success of which was largely attributable to the hospitality and assistance of the host countries.

6. The CHAIRMAN said he took it that the Committee wished to take note of his report.

7. It was so decided.

UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL NGO MEETING AND EUROPEAN NGO SYMPOSIUM ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE, TO BE HELD FROM 2 TO 4 SEPTEMBER 1996 AT GENEVA

8. The CHAIRMAN recalled that the Committee had initially decided, in principle, to hold the 1996 International NGO Meeting in the territory under the Palestinian Authority, and had asked the Israeli Government for permission to hold the meeting in Gaza. More recently, however, in view of the Israeli Government's measures in violation of the agreements between the two sides, which would seriously hamper the organization of the event, the Committee had decided to change the venue to Geneva. Subsequently, it had received a note verbale from the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, denying permission to hold the meeting in Gaza and ignoring the Committee's constructive efforts to promote mutual understanding. In considering that note, the Bureau of the Committee had taken the view that, under the existing agreements between the parties, Israel's permission was not required for the holding of such meetings in the territory under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, although its cooperation in terms of ensuring free passage would be needed. He hoped that such cooperation would be forthcoming, as a significant confidence-building measure, for the holding of future meetings. He also drew attention to a letter on the same subject from the Permanent Observer for Palestine addressed to the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

9. The draft programme for the International NGO Meeting and European NGO Symposium to be held at Geneva was contained in a working paper that had been circulated to members. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the draft programme.

10. It was so decided.

11. The CHAIRMAN said that the composition of the Committee's delegation to the event would be finalized in due course in consultation with interested delegations.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

12. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Palestine) said that the new Israeli Government and the Prime Minister, elected on the basis of an extreme political platform, had adopted a set of guidelines which had aroused grave concern among the Palestinian people and among Arabs in general. The Israeli Government's political statements and decisions - for example, its refusal to allow the International NGO Meeting to be held in Gaza - were equally disturbing. That measure reflected a hostile attitude towards the Committee and towards the international community as a

whole and was a serious violation of the agreements concluded between the Israelis and the Palestinians. It also represented an attempt by the Israelis to impose their will, if necessary, by military means.

13. He noted that the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Netanyahu, during his recent visit to the United States of America, had reaffirmed his Government's commitment to the continuation of the peace process but had rejected the principle of "land for peace" and reiterated that his Government had its own interpretation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Mr. Netanyahu had maintained that his Government respected its agreements with the Palestinian Authority but that implementation would be based on reciprocity and would depend on actions taken by the Authority. He had also indicated that the redeployment of Israeli forces from Hebron must be reconciled with guaranteeing security for settlers, that his Government would enlarge the settlements and that it would not rule out building new ones. The Israeli Prime Minister had said that, while he did not favour the closing of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, he would rescind the measure only when he deemed it appropriate. He had also repeated his vow never to divide Jerusalem or to share the city.

14. Mr. Netanyahu had said that he was willing to negotiate with Syria but that Israel would not withdraw from the Arab-Syrian Golan. Such a statement directly contravened international humanitarian law, as well as many Security Council and General Assembly resolutions and the thrust of the Middle East peace process. If translated into reality, it would grossly violate the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip signed in September 1995. Those two agreements, concluded within the framework of the Middle East peace process and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), embodied the principle of exchanging land for peace. In the agreements, the two sides mutually recognized their legitimate political rights and yet, neither the PLO nor the Palestinian people had ever been mentioned by Mr. Netanyahu, obviously reflecting his view that the Palestinians should be dealt with as a domestic issue. The statements delivered by Mr. Netanyahu in Hebron, where 400 illegal settlers lived in the midst of 120,000 Palestinians, implied that he was calling for the renegotiation of the Interim Agreement as it concerned Hebron. Thus, the first time that the Interim Agreement was put to the test, the Israeli side had simply not complied.

15. The building of settlements was another flagrant violation of the Interim Agreement, which clearly identified settlements as an issue for final status negotiations. Resumed settlement activity would mean further confiscation of Palestinian lands, the pilfering of water and natural resources and the dismembering of the Palestinian territory. He referred to an article in The New York Times of 30 July, which indicated that the Israeli Minister of National Infrastructures had decided to build major new highways in the West Bank.

16. Mr. Netanyahu's statements seemed to indicate that the closing of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was being used as a pressure tactic more than a security measure. In reality, the measure severely restricted the movement of persons and goods within the Palestinian territories and between Palestine and

the outside world, including Israel. That was a large-scale violation of the economic section of the Interim Agreement, which was based on the concepts of free trade and freedom of movement. He noted that the situation of Palestinian workers was only one limited aspect of the problems caused by the restrictions.

17. The status of Jerusalem was another extremely important and sensitive issue. Mr. Netanyahu's statements indicated that he viewed the issue as non-negotiable, which was yet another grave violation of a key provision of the Interim Agreement. In a letter to Mr. Holst, the late Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Mr. Peres, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, had recognized the importance of Palestinian institutions in Jerusalem and stated that they would be preserved during the interim period. The letter had been written at the request of the Palestinian side and should be respected as part of the Agreement. Lastly, the participation of Palestinians living in Jerusalem in the general Palestinian election within the separate and independent district of Jerusalem also clearly illustrated that the Agreement provided for a great deal of flexibility on the issue of Jerusalem pending further negotiations. The Palestinian position in that regard was categorical: Jerusalem was part of the occupied territories and it was the capital of the Palestinian State.

18. Even the more recent meetings between Yasser Arafat and Mr. Levy, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel -- which might be viewed as more positive -- had not succeeded in changing Israel's basic political position or the situation on the ground. The international community must urge Israel to respect the agreements it had already signed and to implement them fully. In that connection, Palestine was counting on the support and solidarity of the Committee and of the United Nations as a whole, in particular during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

19. Mr. NUÑEZ MOSQUERA (Cuba) expressed his delegation's discouragement over the most recent developments in the Middle East. It was also concerned about attempts to hamper the work of the Committee, including Israel's refusal to permit individuals from the territories to participate in an NGO Meeting in Gaza; the closing of its borders; and the restrictions imposed in the territory controlled by the Palestinian Authority. The letter from the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, criticizing the Committee and making it impossible for the international community to participate in an NGO Meeting, were unacceptable. The situation must be referred to the General Assembly for appropriate action at its fifty-first session.

20. Mr. KITTIKHOUN (Lao People's Democratic Republic) asked what action the Committee could take in the face of the latest developments. The Committee had been patient pending the outcome of the recent Arab Summit Conference; various meetings of eminent personalities from different countries, including Arab countries; the meeting between President Mubarak of Egypt and President Clinton of the United States of America; and was now awaiting the results of the election year in the United States. However, it could not delay action indefinitely. Fortunately, the Committee had not been dismantled when the peace process was initiated, because the situation was now changing. He had even heard that, under the Labour Party Government in Israel, there had been a secret

agreement concerning a Palestinian State. Now all the progress in that direction had been undone.

21. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Palestine) agreed with the Lao representative that recent developments only confirmed that the Committee had a continuing mandate.

OTHER MATTERS

22. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Palestine) expressed concern about the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information and the fact that the relevant General Assembly resolution might not have been implemented. He hoped that the shortcomings observed in the past year would soon be corrected.

The meeting rose at 4.35 p.m.